

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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R 051344Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5917
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAPE TOWN 0507

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR SF UR
SUBJ: PODGORNÝ VISIT HEIGHTENS SOUTH AFRICAN FEARS

1. SUMMARY: THE VISIT OF SOVIET PRESIDENT PODGORNÝ TO SEVERAL AFRICAN STATES HAS, IN THE VIEW OF WHITE SOUTH AFRICA, POINTED UP MORE CLEARLY THAN EVER A CREDIBLE SOVIET EFFORT TO EXTEND ITS INFLUENCE IN THE REGION. LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE ALIKE, THEY WONDER WHETHER OR NOT THE US UNDERSTANDS THE STRUGGLE GOING ON, AND WHAT TO THEM IS SOUTH AFRICA'S IMPORTANCE TO THE WEST IN THAT STRUGGLE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PODGORNÝ VISIT HAS BEEN COVERED EXTENSIVELY, BUT
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SELECTIVELY, IN SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA AS REPORTED SEPARATELY. PODGORNÝ'S STATEMENTS CALLING FOR SUPPORT OF MAJORITY RULE, GUERRILLAS AND TERRORISTS HAVE FIGURED PROMINENTLY. SAG HAS MADE NO OFFICIAL COMMENT, BUT SABC RADIO AND TELEVISION ANALYSTS HAVE USED THE OCCASION TO DISCUSS ONCE MORE, AS THEY DID AT THE TIME OF THE ANGOLA CRISIS, WHAT THEY CONSIDER TO BE WESTERN LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF

THE STRATEGIC REALITIES. THEY PORTRAY SOUTH AFRICA AS A BASTION OF WESTERN STRATEGIC INTERESTS AS WELL AS BASIC VALUES, AND WONDER WHY THE WEST SHOULD PERSIST IN BEING PREDOMINANTLY OCCUPIED BY MORALIZING ON THE RACE ISSUE WHILE ITS ENEMIES ARE CLEARLY IN THE PROCESS OF ATTEMPTING TO TAKE OVER SOUTHERN AFRICA. HOLDING THAT BLACK AFRICA CAN HARDLY BE SAID TO BE ILLUSTRATIVE OF WESTERN DEMOCRACY OR FUNDAMENTAL VALUES INsofar AS HUMAN RIGHTS ARE CONCERNED, THE COMMENTATORS STRESS THAT SOUTH AFRICA NOT ONLY OFFERS A BETTER LIFE THAN ANYBODY ELSE IN AFRICA FOR ALL ITS CITIZENS, BUT MAINTAIN THAT GENUINE MOVES ARE UNDERWAY WHICH WILL END RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND PROVIDE A POLITICAL FORUM FOR ALL, EACH IN HIS RESPECTIVE SPHERE. WHY, THEN, SHOULD NOT THE WEST HELP SOUTH AFRICA RESIST THE RUSSIANS?

3. PODGORNYY HELPED MAKE THE LARGEST-EVER SAG DEFENSE BUDGET PALATABLE (971 MILLION RAND IN 1975 TO 1.65 BILLION IN 1977). DESPITE HIGHER COSTS AND TAXES ALL AROUND, SOUTH AFRICANS HAVE CONCLUDED THEY MUST GO IT ALONE, HOWEVER RELUCTANTLY. MEDIA ANALYSTS HAVE MENTIONED FAVORABLE COMMENTS MADE BY BRITISH STRATEGIC RESEARCH BODIES IN THE PAST ABOUT SAG ABILITY TO DEVELOP AND SUSTAIN THE BEST DEFENSE FORCE IN AFRICA. ONE RADIO COMMENTATOR CONCLUDED GRIMLY THAT SOUTH AFRICA WOULD IF NECESSARY GO DOWN TO THE BITTER END AGAINST THE SOVIETS IF THEY WERE TO TRY TO OVERRUN THE COUNTRY. HE POINTED OUT PROBLEMS OF DISTANCE AND LOGISTICS IN EXPLAINING WHY A SOVIET INVASION COULD NOT BE UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT

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GREAT DIFFICULTY.

4. CONSERVATIVES COULD BE EXPECTED TO PLAY THE PODGORNYY VISIT FOR ALL IT IS WORTH TO UNDERSCORE THE THREAT OF WHICH THEY HAVE WARNED FOR YEARS. LIBERAL WHITES OTHERWISE TOTALLY AT ODDS WITH THE SAG, ARE ALSO NOW BEGINNING TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT SOVIET ACTIVITIES. LIBERALS RECOGNIZE THAT SAG INTRANSIGENCE ON RACIST POLICY PLAYS INTO SOVIET HANDS IN THAT IT TENDS TO DRIVE FRUSTRATED BLACKS TOWARD THE SOVIETS. THEY HAVE, HOWEVER, BEGUN TO FEEL THAT THEY, TOO, ARE AMONG THE POTENTIAL VICTIMS OF THE SOVIET THREAT. THEY TEND TO VIEW WESTERN PRIORITIES AS SKEWED AND, RECALLING PARTICULARLY THE ANGOLAN EXPERIENCE, APPEAR PUZZLED AND INCREASINGLY ALARMED BY THEIR PERCEPTION THAT THE WEST IS IMMOBILIZED IN THE FACE OF SOVIET INITIATIVES. BOWDLER

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